



# DHS Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to [DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:DHS-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

## Berrien County supervisor is local prevention advocate of year

From Jerry Frank, Director

Berrien County DHS, Benton Harbor

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**Chuck Filibeck**, long time Berrien County CPS supervisor and 28-year DHS employee, was recently honored by the Berrien County Council for Children as its 2005 Jim Leep Abuse Prevention Advocate of the Year.

Chuck received the award March 11 at the annual "Give Your Heart to a Child" benefit and auction in South Bend, Ind. hosted by the Berrien County Council for Children and Children's Assessment Center, Cass County Youth Council, and Prevent Child Abuse St. Joseph County, Ind. He was selected for this tribute based on his many years of outstanding service as a CPS worker and supervisor.

Chuck is recognized as a committed professional with excellent knowledge in the field of child protection. He was instrumental in the development of the Children's Assessment Center of Berrien County.

Chuck is currently serving as vice-chair of the Berrien County Council for Children board and is very active in its continuing growth and development. He also served as co-leader of the CPS Peer Review Team and is a current member of the statewide workgroup on child deaths.

We are pleased Chuck has received this well deserved recognition and we are proud that he is part of the Berrien DHS team.



**Chuck Filibeck with his award.**

## My sister, social worker

From Kathleen A. Blondin-Stone, Services Specialist

Saginaw County DHS, Saginaw

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My sister, Pamela Blondin, M.S.W., gave a speech to our area school social workers. She read it to me over the phone. I loved it and asked for a copy. Here is some of what she said:

"Social work: I'm proud to be a social worker and I hope all of you are too. I think we get a bad rap sometimes. So often in movies or on TV or in books, social workers are depicted as busybodies who interfere in peoples' lives or else we are portrayed as incompetent do-gooders who just don't 'get it.'"

"I think part of the reason that social work is not respected as much as it should be is that we are identified with the people we so often work with: the poor, the disenfranchised, the struggling, the mentally ill or developmentally disabled, children, elderly, teenagers. We are the voice of the voiceless."

"I think that is what makes our profession so special and even honorable. Jesus spent a lot of time with people who were considered socially undesirable and he was condemned for this. Often we are too. We go into neighborhoods and houses where many people wouldn't go by choice. And we go unarmed, except for our pagers and cell phones, and often at some risk."

*Continues next page, "My sister..."*

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## My sister, social worker *from page 1*

"Every day in our jobs we are intimately involved with people who are struggling and sometimes at a very low point in their lives and we help them find a better way. We don't go into it for the money. I think most of us became social workers because we wanted to help people—and we do.

"There was a time when the culture supported our efforts more than it does now. So maybe we need to do more to support each other and to encourage each other to maintain our identity as social workers (the new licensing law really helps with this.)

"Social work month (celebrated in March) is a time when we remind ourselves that:

- It is a privilege to do the work we do.
- Our profession is an honorable one deserving of respect.
- We have the education, skill and values to listen with a non-judgmental heart, to confront injustice, to speak truth to power, and to heal the broken."

Pam, her husband and members of their church, St. Mary's Cathedral here in Saginaw, have started up a free mental health clinic for adults without insurance.



**April 26 was Administrative Professionals Day.** Managers of the Allegan County DHS helped their administrative support staff celebrate Administrative Professionals' Day April 26 by preparing and serving afternoon tea and honoring them with gifts of appreciation. The administrative support employees received beautiful custom invitations to prepare them for the event. The table was decorated with fresh flowers and candles. The menu included freshly steeped teas (Earl Grey, Lady Grey, English Breakfast, and Constant Comment) served in china cups and saucers, a non-alcoholic pina colada punch, scones with fruit jams, petit fours, and teacake. Gifts were sculpted metal garden stakes in pastel colors with a "welcome" flower atop each stake. Left to right, in the attached picture are: [Sharon VandeVrede](#), [LuAnn Smith](#), [Stacy Flores](#), [Sally Gunn](#), [Colleen \(Jakie\) Cooley](#), [Jan Belden](#), [Wendy Miller](#), [Deb Belden](#), [Renee Rincones](#) and [Cindy Spaman](#).

– from [Susan Bailey-Carman](#)

## Meriann and the dental clinic

### Transcending services in a school program

From Barbara Anders, District Manager  
Genesee County DHS McCree District, Flint  
[AndersB@michigan.gov](mailto:AndersB@michigan.gov)

Most people, when going to the dentist are concerned about whether the dentist is going to have to perform any urban renewal in their mouths. Not **Meriann Thomsen**, FIM at the McCree District office in Genesee County!

Meriann supervises the DHS staff at the Family Resource Center located in the Durant-Tuuri-Mott (DTM) elementary school in Flint.

Last spring, through a lot of hard work by all concerned, Hamilton Community Health Network, a local non-profit clinic, brought a mobile dental clinic onsite for the children attending DTM.

We had hoped to extend the dental services to adults sometime this year but ran into problems due to problems with the mobile unit and the inability of the clinic to locate an adult-sized dental chair.

Enter Meriann, who kept her regular dentist appointment in March only to discover that her dentist was moving to a new office.

The staff was busily packing things away in anticipation of the move.

Meriann asked her dentist, Dr. Paul Decker, if he was planning on getting rid of anything and did he need a good tax write-off (always thinkin', our Meriann!)

The final outcome of Meriann's trip to the dentist? Dr. Decker donated two hydraulic chairs with overhead lights, two dentist chairs, two assistant chairs, two rolling carts, three x-ray heads, a plastic children's table with two chairs, x-ray film, a mount and a very old, very small autoclave that could be used in the mobile unit.

The sum of the donated equipment has been set up in the Community Resource Center at DTM so there is now a permanent dental office available. Dental services will be offered to adults in the very near future. What a tribute to Meriann's networking skills!

Oh, by the way, Meriann didn't have any cavities!

■ For more information about Family Resource Centers, go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs) and click on "Individual and Family Services", "Special Services" and "Family Resource Centers".



In the Family Resource Center clinic (l-r): **Meriann Thomsen** of Genesee DHS, Carrie Reeve, Jen Bradley and Lisa Babinger from Hamilton Clinic.

**Date:** April 25  
**To:** DHSWeb@michigan.gov  
**Subject:** My caseworker

Your agency gets a lot of grumbling (and) complaining letters. This one is just the opposite. I would like to tell you about my caseworker, **Abbey VanHoeven**, from the Kent County office.

Two years ago I was 44 years old and homeless with two teenage children. I showed up at DHS a mental mess as I was brought up to "take care of myself." Here I was, in the "welfare place" having to ask for help. Abbey was assigned to my case.

Not only did she make me feel like a human and that it was okay to ask for help, I walked out with a food card and hope of finding a place to live. Abbey went above and beyond the "duty" of a caseworker to help me. But most of all, she made me feel good about myself again and that things would be okay.

I was enrolled in the Michigan Works! program that put me through college and graduated the medical administrative assistance program with a 96.4 GPA, feeling good; but that was quick to end. I did not give up when resume after resume went overlooked. Finally, after 200 applications and two interviews from the whole bunch, I got a job. After six months, my back injury returned, landing me in bed for the past five weeks and a few more before we are done with treatment. My work is bending over backward to keep my job by offering me FMLA (usually one year of employment is required).

Yesterday, after being stubborn enough to let us almost starve to death, I called Abbey. We talked and she found that even working I had only been able to buy groceries twice since Thanksgiving. I had gone to local church for food and made arrangements with my electric company to hold off ... but time was running out and panic of no money was hitting me hard.

Now the purpose of this letter, Abbey VanHoeven came to my house with paperwork (I live on second floor of a historical home and cannot make the steps well and had no gas in my car). Not only did she bring paperwork, she showed up with five bags of food! She had gone home on her lunch, as did her supervisor, to gather what they could spare. She knew that we had not had a loaf of bread or gallon of milk in over a month. She used her own money to pick up some hamburger, buns, milk and bread.

Your office is very, very lucky to have someone with an attitude, smile, and love of helping people as Abbey VanHoeven. She sets the example of human kindness.

If your office has something as "Caseworker of the Year", I would like to nominate Abbey VanHoeven. (She has mentioned previously, that she has gone to her house to get blankets for people she couldn't help immediately).

Thank you for listening to my tale and I hope that this letter gets to the proper persons that will let Abbey know that she is one special caseworker as well as human being. I was walking with God when he gave me Abbey as a caseworker.

She is truly a living angel and I know this from talking with her over the telephone and having meetings during the previous two years.

Please, please do recognize Abbey in some way as she is truly one of the most genuinely kind persons I have ever met.

**Kimberly Crissman**

Lowell

■ *Abbey VanHoeven is a family independence specialist at Kent County DHS in Grand Rapids. [DHSNet@michigan.gov](mailto:DHSNet@michigan.gov) is a mailbox at the Department of Human Services Web site.*

**Your letters,  
intercepted  
and otherwise**

Customer letters praising employees are very popular with other employees. To submit a customer letter for publication:

1. Your supervisor must know about this and approve it.
2. The customer must sign the **Consent for Publication** form downloadable from the MS Word template as **0199.dot**.
3. Send the letter and a copy of the signed consent to the newsletter e-mail box or fax it to Larry VanDeSande at 517-373-8471.
4. Include the letter writer's hometown and the job classification(s) of the employee(s) cited in the letter.

DHS Matters! readers look forward to reading your letters.  
Larry VanDeSande  
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